



Press Release

Public Affairs Office
Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command
1562 Mitscher Avenue,
Suite 250
Norfolk, Va. 23551-2487
(757) 836-3600
Fax: (757) 836-3601

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Navy, NASA team up to recover ORION Crew Module

NORFOLK, Va. (Aug. 14, 2013) The first recovery tests of the new Orion Human Space Flight crew module occurred this week aboard USS Arlington (LPD 24) at Naval Station Norfolk.

This week's recovery efforts aboard Arlington allowed NASA experts a hands-on opportunity to work closely with the Navy to plan the future crew module recovery process.

"This is a significant milestone in the Navy's partnership with NASA and the Orion Human Space Flight program," said Adm. Bill Gortney, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command. "The Navy is excited to support NASA's continuing mission of space exploration. Our unique capabilities make us an ideal partner for NASA in the safe recovery of our astronauts in the 21st century – just as we did nearly a half century ago in support of America's quest to put a man on the moon."

The amphibious assault ship Arlington is one the Navy's newest amphibious assault ships. The ship's well deck, capability to embark helicopters, air search radar and medical facilities made it an ideal platform for the recovery.

According to Cmdr. Darren Nelson, commanding officer of Arlington, the ship's crew is enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with NASA during this phase of their manned space program.

"Of course, Arlington's crew of Sailors and Marines and I are thrilled to be a part of this," said Nelson. "The U.S. Navy has been part of America's space program almost since the beginning. From 1961 – 1975, Navy ships recovered Mercury, Gemini and Apollo spacecraft after splashing down in the oceans, transporting capsules and crews safely to land."

Several of these historic recoveries were facilitated by Arlington's predecessor, the second ship in the U.S. fleet to bear the name. The major communications relay ship USS Arlington (AGMR 2) assisted in the recovery of Apollo 8 after its splashdown in the Northern Pacific on Dec. 27, 1968. Arlington also aided in the recovery of Apollo 10 on May 26, 1969. Most famously, the ship took part in the recovery of Apollo 11 (the first to land on the moon) on July 24, 1969.

"As the captain of a Navy warship, and for virtually every member of my crew, this opportunity to work with NASA is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Nelson. "Lessons learned from these tests will be used in Navy dive team training, crew module recovery procedures, support equipment design, dockside handling procedures and equipment and personnel task loading."

Unlike the early recovery operations where the spacecraft had to be lifted aboard Navy ships via helicopter, the Arlington simply opens her stern gate and the Orion is towed into the ship's flooded well deck by small boats.

During this phase of the stationary recovery test, Arlington remained moored pier side while the Orion capsule was brought aboard the ship via a barge. Once aboard the ship, Arlington's well deck was flooded and the capsule was towed to open water where Navy divers practiced attaching tow lines to the spacecraft. Sailors then towed the craft back into Arlington's well deck.

Arlington's crew and NASA engineers determined the best methods for securing Orion prior to pumping the well deck dry and settling the spacecraft into a specially designed cradle.

Nelson said that after a week's testing, he couldn't be prouder of his crews' performance.

"Arlington is truly proud to contribute in the future success of human space flight and U.S. national space policies and programs, one that will ultimately lead toward another large step for mankind," said Nelson.

The second major test of the crew module and recovery process is planned for early 2014 off the west coast. The tests are part of preparations for the first flight of Orion, Exploration Flight Test-1 (EFT-1), in the fall of 2014.